

DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATIONS

Refuge Name: Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge

County: Morehouse and Union Parishes, Louisiana

Establishing and Acquisition Authority: Migratory Bird Conservation Act

Refuge Purpose(s): “for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds” (Migratory Bird Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 7153); and for “...the conservation of the wetlands of the nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions...” (16 U.S.C. 3901 (b)).

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission: “The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans” (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended) [16 U.S.C. §668dd-668ee].

Description of Use:

Hiking, Jogging, and Walking

Hiking, jogging and walking facilitates travel and access for the priority public uses. Priority public uses as defined in the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 include hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

The primary areas of these uses occur along refuge roads and trails which are maintained for priority public uses. At times, individuals will walk along rights-of-way or across country throughout the refuge scouting for hunting areas. Individuals assessing the refuge for hunting will need to possess a valid hunting permit and follow all refuge regulations. Access to the refuge is open every day and night; however certain portions of the refuge may be closed to access by the public for purposes of sanctuary to migratory birds. In addition, entry on all or portions of individual areas may be temporarily suspended by posting upon occasions of unusual or critical conditions affecting land, water, vegetation, wildlife populations, or public safety.

Hiking, jogging, or walking can facilitate non-consumptive priority public uses by allowing observation of the natural landscape and wildlife viewing. Individuals stop to observe associated animals and plant communities. The use mainly occurs in very small groups or by individuals. Regarding consumptive uses, anglers and hunters can access refuge lands by walking on the refuge.

Access to the refuge is necessary for desirable use and management of the refuge. Foot traffic on the refuge provides increased access and opportunities to participate in priority public uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Personnel time associated with administration and law enforcement

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs: Maintenance costs are not directly attributable to these incidental uses on the refuge.

Monitoring costs: Minimal costs are associated with these uses to monitor consequences of public having access to the refuge, such as degree of littering and vandalism. Plants and wildlife will be monitored to determine any impacts as a result of public use.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term Impacts:

Hiking, jogging, and walking access is typically by single individuals or small groups on improved refuge roads. Damage to habitat is negligible. Foot traffic off of designated roads and trails is sporadic and dispersed for minimal disturbance.

Some temporary disturbance does occur to wildlife due to human activity on the land, as with any level of public use. Use is sporadic though and limited. Any unreasonable harassment would be grounds for the manager to close the area to these uses or restrict the uses to minimize harm.

Disturbance to trust species are minimal due to the locations of the designated gravel roads and trails. Short-term impacts to facilities, such as roads and trails, are not expected.

Long-term Impacts:

Long-term impacts are not anticipated; however, plants and wildlife will be monitored.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated; however, the program can be modified in the future to mitigate unforeseen impacts.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Determination (check one below):

☐ Use is Not Compatible

☒ Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

Camping and fires are prohibited, and personal belongings may not be left on the refuge overnight. Harassment of wildlife is prohibited as well as the taking of any plant, animal or artifact from the refuge.

If any adverse impacts occur from any aspect of the public access, then further restrictions may be imposed to protect the plant and animal resources of the refuge. Any group associated with a commercial operator (eg. Birding tour) will need to request special permission from the refuge manager.

Individuals walking or hiking to support hunting opportunities will follow all refuge regulations and possess a valid hunting permit. Organized group events such as charity runs or fun runs are not allowed.

Justification:

Hiking, walking and jogging, as identified in this determination, are not expected to materially interfere with or detract from the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System or from the purposes for which the refuge was established. The associated disturbance to wildlife and habitat is temporary and minor. Monitoring would be conducted to ensure that these uses remain compatible. If uses increase and impacts are suspected, a re-evaluation will be conducted and corrective actions taken to protect refuge resources. These uses provide opportunities to participate in wildlife observation and photography. Outdoor recreational activities provide individuals with quality wildlife-oriented experiences, educational opportunities, and allow them to utilize a natural environment.

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026

Description of Use:

Boating – Motorized & Human-powered

There are over 2,900 acres of permanent open water on the refuge, with the Ouachita River traversing a 13.7 mile course through the refuge. At times, over 85% of the refuge can be flooded as a deep overflow swamp from the Ouachita River. As a result, anglers and hunters use motorized and non-motorized boating. Also non-consumptive users boat for wildlife observation and photography purposes.

Access to boating occurs from the river upstream or downstream of the refuge and several boat launches on the refuge. Certain areas of the refuge are closed to boating at certain times to allow for migratory bird sanctuary. These areas are delineated in the Public Use Regulations brochure and are marked physically on the refuge. Entry on all or portions of individual areas may be temporarily suspended by posting upon occasions

of unusual or critical conditions affecting land, water, vegetation, wildlife populations, or public safety.

Boating provides access to fishing, wildlife observation and wildlife photography, which are all priority public uses. Since fish and wildlife observation and fishing are an integral part of the boating experience, it is considered a wildlife-oriented activity.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Personnel time associated with administration and law enforcement

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

Boat ramp, brochures, parking lot, and access roads

Maintenance costs: Every 3-5 years the annual maintenance costs may increase in order to provide gravel for parking lots and roads and replace signs.

Monitoring costs: Minimal costs are associated with monitoring the consequences of the public having access to the refuge, such as degree of littering and vandalism.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Boating is restricted to the river and its tributaries and backwaters. Access is typically by a couple of individuals per boat. Disturbance could occur to wading bird colonies but usually rookeries form over very shallow water often not accessible by boat. Boating can disturb wildlife, especially birds because it disrupts feeding activity and can affect large areas in a short period of time. The disturbance can result in increased energy expenditures from avoidance flights and decreased energy intake due to interference with feeding activity. This is important to survival especially with wintering waterfowl. However the majority of wintering waterfowl congregate in an area of the refuge that is closed to boating just for that particular reason.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Determination (check one below):

☐ Use is Not Compatible

☒ Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

Motorized land vehicles are required to remain on designated roads only. Boats and

other personal belongings are not allowed to be left on the refuge overnight. Harassment of wildlife is prohibited. Boating is restricted from certain areas of the refuge during winter to protect wintering waterfowl from disturbance. Personal watercraft are not permitted. Organized group riding of boats is not allowed. Commercial events cannot be held on the refuge (eg. fishing tournament weigh-ins). If any adverse impacts occur from any aspect of boating, then further restrictions may be imposed to protect the plant and animal resources of the refuge.

Justification:

Outdoor recreational activities provide individuals with quality wildlife-oriented experiences, educational opportunities, and allow them to utilize a natural environment. Motorized and human-powered boating for fishing and wildlife observation is a low impact and low cost activity on Upper Ouachita NWR. Boating provides access to fishing and hunting, priority public uses. Since fish and wildlife observation is an integral part of the boating experience, it is considered a wildlife-oriented activity and therefore does not materially detract or interfere with the purposes of the refuge or mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026

Description of Use:

Plant gathering

Berry picking is not one of the six priority public wildlife-dependant uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System but it is a historical use of the land before the refuge was established. The collection of native fruit is for personal (non-commercial) use on the refuge without a Special Use Permit required.

Mayhaw fruit ripens in late April-May with collection being very time consuming and quite difficult, with further complication of the refuge being flooded in some years. No more than a few individuals make an effort to gather mayhaws resulting in very little quantity of fruit actually removed, and therefore no restriction is made on the number of individuals allowed for this use. Blackberries/dewberries/muscadine grow in thickets in the understory along trails and in the upland forest.

Seldom has the refuge received a request for acorn collection. These will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine if the cause is for reforestation and whether productivity of the tree species is available. Stipulations for area and methods of acorn collection will be issued with a Special Use Permit. No commercial operations will be allowed.

Berry-picking collections would be allowed on the entire refuge. Mayhaws occur in the bottomland hardwoods, and blackberries/dewberries are in most any of the areas on the refuge. Picking would most likely occur in the mornings of late spring for mayhaws and summer for blackberries/dewberries/muscadines. No commercial equipment would be permitted. Mayhaw pickers may use cherry picking ladders to get in the tops of trees but would have to carry the ladder in and out on each trip. Mayhaws would primarily be picked in areas adjacent to roads or in water by boat.

This was an existing use prior to refuge establishment, and the general public still requests access for the activity as it is a traditional use. The demand for this use is very light, but the refuge wants the public to feel free to pick a handful of blackberries or mayhaws to eat while walking the refuge.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use: Staff will not be involved in the collection of berries. Acorn collection proposals will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis within existing resources.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs: None

Monitoring costs: Monitoring and compliance would be handled within existing resources, programs and staff time.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term Impacts:

Collection of fruits and berries for personal use will have a negligible impact on forest and wildlife resources. Some habitat trampling or disturbance may occur with foot-traffic to berry-picking areas, but no more than other uses such as wildlife observation while hiking. Short-term impacts are minimal and not significant due to the current, small number of users.

No significant increase in the magnitude of this use is expected over the next 10 years. In fact, a decrease would be expected based on change in demographics. If for some unanticipated reason this level of use increases a significant degree, a new compatibility determination would be required and regulating measures (eg. SUP and quantity restrictions) could be evaluated with subsequent public comment.

Long-term Impacts:

Direct impact is a small amount of plant resources taken from individual trees or shrubs, but is extremely insignificant on the scale of habitat acres available over the long-term for mayhaw and blackberry/dewberry/muscadine seeding. Little concern exists for removing too many mayhaws since the amount is insignificant and it has been noted by Martin et al. (1961) that "the small apple-like fruits are not used by wildlife to nearly so great an extent as might be anticipated". Blackberries/dewberries/muscadines are ubiquitous in range and so numerous that wildlife would not be impacted by the small amount removed for human consumption.

Cumulative Impacts:

No negative cumulative impacts are expected. As stated earlier, it is expected the use will decline in the future as demographics change. No conflict of users occurs since berry-picking occurs outside of the hunting season.

Public Review and Comment: The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Determination (check one below):

Use is Not Compatible

 X Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Berry pickers may not sell berries or otherwise engage in commercial activities associated with berry picking. Cherry picking ladders can be used but must be carried in and out on each trip. No personal belongings may be left on the refuge overnight. All refuge regulations are applicable, including vehicle use.

Justification:

Picking wild berries for personal consumption is not an economic use and does not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purpose of the refuge. No significant wildlife or habitat disturbance occurs from the light demand, and accessibility is limited. No refuge support is needed for implementation of this use. Picking wild berries fosters wildlife observation on the refuge and illustrates the advantage of certain plants and a healthy environment to the public.

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026

Martin, Zim and Nelson. 1961. "American Wildlife & Plants—A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits"

Description of Use:

Bicycling

Bicycling facilitates travel and access for the priority public uses on Upper Ouachita NWR. Priority public uses as defined in the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 include hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

Bicycles are considered legal modes of transportation on most State and Parish roads. Therefore, in most cases where refuge roads are open to vehicles, they are open to bicycles. Bicycles will not be allowed if there are safety issues or wildlife disturbance issues. Secondary roads that are closed to vehicles are open to bicycles since they support the wildlife dependent recreational activities. Bicycle races or other organized

group events are not allowed.

Bicycling will only be allowed in areas open to the public. Cyclists accessing the refuge for hunting will need to possess a valid hunting permit and follow all refuge regulations. Access to the refuge is open every day; however, certain portions of the refuge are closed to access for purpose of wildlife sanctuary. Entry on all or portions of individual areas may be temporarily suspended by posting upon occasions of unusual or critical conditions affecting land, water, vegetation, wildlife populations, or public safety.

Bicycling to facilitate non-consumptive priority public uses involves observing the natural landscape from a bicycle. Riders stop to observe associated animals and plant communities. The use mainly occurs by individual users rather than groups.

Bicycle travel is conducted in accordance with stipulations necessary to ensure compatibility. Access to the refuge is necessary for desirable use and management of the refuge. Bicycle travel on the refuge provides increased access and opportunities to participate in priority public uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography. It is an alternative means of travel to view the refuge's diverse biological assets and can be less physically demanding than pedestrian travel for some users. It can also be a form of exercise while enjoying the outdoors.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use: Personnel time associated with administration and law enforcement

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:
None

Maintenance costs: none

Monitoring costs: Monitoring and compliance would be handled within existing resources, programs and staff time.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term Impacts:

Bicycle access is typically by single individuals on improved refuge roads. Damage to habitat is negligible. Access by bicycle during the hunting season is often used to retrieve game or to access remote areas of the refuge to hunt. Use is sporadic and dispersed for minimal disturbance.

Some temporary disturbance can occur to wildlife due to human activity on the land, but no more so than any other use, and actually probably less. Disturbance to wildlife is temporary and minor but would be monitored. Any unreasonable harassment would be grounds for the manager to close the area to bicycling or restrict the use to minimize harm.

Long-term Impacts:

No long-term impacts are anticipated; however, the program can be modified in the future to mitigate unforeseen impacts.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated; however, the program can be modified in the future to mitigate unforeseen impacts.

Public Review and Comment: The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Determination (check one below):

Use is Not Compatible

 X Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

No equipment may be left on the refuge overnight. Harassment of wildlife is prohibited. If any adverse impacts occur from any aspect of this use, then further restrictions may be imposed to protect the plant and animal resources on the refuge. Individuals using bicycles to support hunting will follow all refuge regulations and will possess a valid hunting permit. Bicycle races or other organized group events are not allowed.

Justification:

Bicycle use, as identified in this determination, is not expected to materially interfere with or detract from the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System or from the purposes for which the refuge was established. The associated disturbance to wildlife and habitat is temporary and minor. Monitoring will be conducted to ensure that this use remains compatible. If use increases and impacts are suspected, a re-evaluation will be conducted and corrective actions taken to protect refuge resources. Bicycles are used to facilitate priority public uses as a reasonable mode of access. Outdoor recreational activities provide individuals with quality wildlife-oriented experiences, educational opportunities, and allow them to utilize a natural environment.

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026

Description of Use:

Forest Management – Timber Harvest

Forest management, per timber harvest sales, is the only realistic tool that is available to enable the refuge to achieve wildlife habitat objectives. The forests of the southeast often require significant disturbance at a level of acreage that cannot be achieved without commercial operations. Therefore, forest management packages are offered for bid, with those trees in excess of management needs offered for harvest. The excess

value of the trees in relation to the cost of the entire management package will be the amount paid to the government and placed in the general fund. Forest management is conducted to benefit wildlife and further the refuge purpose. It is not based on current or future economic gain from timber harvest.

Refuge foresters, biologists, and managers decide where forest management is needed according to objectives listed in the Habitat Management Plan. Designated areas are marked with blue paint and on a map. Timber harvest sales occur when forest management is needed, soil conditions are appropriate for the least impact, and when the bidding process is complete.

Active forest management consists of mechanical removal of commercial and non-commercial forest products by refuge personnel or contractors utilizing conventional logging equipment. The refuge is sub-divided into manageable sized compartments that are selected for forest management activities based on the greatest need for wildlife habitat improvement, tempered with considerations for spatial, temporal and area constraints. Once selected, vegetative/wildlife data are collected and analyzed to determine the extent of treatment needed, then expressed in a document that details the specific silvicultural strategies necessary to obtain specific wildlife habitat objectives. Only those trees marked with two spots of blue paint could be cut. Stumps are cut as low as possible to the ground as long as some portion of the paint remains visible on the stump. Special Use Permits detailing specific environmental, fiscal, physical and administrative constraints are issued to contractors that have bid the highest for the forest products or through the negotiation process, if applicable. All state and federal permits, clearances and consultations such as State Historic Preservation Office cultural resource clearance, permits associated with the Clean Waters Act and Intra-Service Section 7 consultation are obtained prior to implementing the Special Use Permit. Timber harvest sales require a pre-entry conference between a refuge forester and permittee before starting logging operations.

Forest management is often needed to improve the general health, productivity, diversity and quality of the bottomland and upland forests. Forest stands often need to be gradually thinned to reduce competition, to increase diversity, to increase understory growth, to lessen the chance for epidemics of damaging insects and to remove diseased trees. Thinnings often mimic natural disturbances to reduce canopy cover allowing sunlight to the forest floor. In turn, more understory plant growth provides greater structure for nesting birds, cover for resident game and food for all wildlife. Thinning of pine forests is necessary to achieve foraging objectives for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. Accomplishment of habitat improvement objectives requires the commercial sale of refuge timber since funding and staffing never has, and never will be, at a level to achieve force account (refuge staff) conducted actions only.

All timber harvests follow prescriptions written in accordance with the approved Habitat Management Plan and based on timber inventory data.

Availability of Resources

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Forest management activities are administered by refuge staff and do not exceed the general operational costs of the refuge. Recent management staff losses due to

inadequate operational funding is and will continue to impact the refuge's ability to implement habitat management actions at a level needed to maintain and improve habitat conditions. This activity is perhaps the single highest priority for the refuge due to its critical nature in achieving wildlife objectives (LMVJV 2007) and staff will continue to make every effort to address forest stand improvements needed.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs: None

Monitoring Costs:

Refuge staff will conduct monitoring protocols according to the individual prescription, Habitat Management Plan and Inventory and Monitoring Plan to determine when habitat conditions warrant treatment and to monitor achievement of habitat condition objectives post treatment.

Offsetting Revenues:

Utilizing contract loggers to achieve forest habitat management goals is the only way to achieve improvement given inadequate staff to implement force account harvest activities. Receipts generated from the sale of forest products removed from the refuge are deposited into the Refuge Revenue Sharing Account. The funds collected annually from all refuges are distributed to the counties on a prorated basis (acreage of refuge land within each county and appraised value of this land) as an "in-lieu-taxes payment" as directed by the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term Impacts:

Logging activities result in some soil disturbance that results in minor soil compaction and erosion. Minor siltation and turbidity of streams may occur; however, most streams on the refuge are intermittent and are mostly dry during normal logging seasons. In addition, best management practices are implemented utilizing buffer zones placed along bayous, rivers and creeks. Besides the removal of some trees on sales, minor damage of some residual trees and other vegetation will occur.

Long-term Impacts

No adverse long-term impacts are anticipated. On the contrary, the refuge expects positive long-term impacts such as increased forest health, diversity, species composition and vertical structure. These forest characteristics will lead to better habitat for resident wildlife, such as squirrels and deer, waterfowl, and nesting songbirds, such as hooded, Kentucky, and Swainson's warblers. Thinning upland pine forest is necessary for the improvement of endangered red-cockaded woodpecker habitat.

Cumulative Impacts

No adverse cumulative impacts are anticipated. The refuge forest management program implemented according to the Habitat Management Plan will promote a healthy, native forest for generations to come.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Determination (check one below):

Use is Not Compatible

 X Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

- Ensure adherence to the Habitat Management Plan and timber prescription and associated Special Use Permit.
- Sale of forest products is utilized only when it is the most efficient and cost effective method of managing refuge forests.
- Harvested trees are sold under fair trade principles, and in a manner in which the government will be compensated at a fair market value.
- All roads, pipelines, and ditches must be kept clear of brush and debris.
- All tops falling into rights-of-way must be immediately cleared.
- To prevent rutting on access roads, entry is prohibited during periods of wet ground conditions.
- No littering or fires.
- Best Management Practices will be implemented.
- Refuge staff may shut down timber operations at any time for safety, administrative, or biological reasons.

Justification:

The refuge forest needs a variety of treatments to enhance habitat conditions for all migratory and resident wildlife species. Bottomland forests must have openings created to keep adequate understory and midstory for a variety of songbirds, white-tailed deer, turkey and other wildlife (LMVJV 2007). Thinning bottomland forests will create better conditions for remaining trees to grow larger and create better mast crop for wood ducks and other game species. Timber harvest in upland pine and hardwood forests is directed towards increasing tree species diversity and vertical structure. Timber harvest within the red-cockaded woodpecker habitat is necessary to ensure the species in perpetuity. Forest management, per timber harvest, is compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and is the single most effective tool enabling the refuge to meet wildlife habitat objectives.

LMVJV Forest Resource Conservation Working Group. 2007. Restoration, Management and Monitoring of Forest Resources in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley: Recommendations for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat. Edited by R. Wilson, K. Ribbeck, S. King, and D. Twedt

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026

Description of Use:

Firewood Cutting

Firewood cutting and gathering is not one of the six priority public wildlife-dependent uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System but is a historical use of the refuge covered under a previous compatibility determination completed in 2006. Firewood cutting is generally defined as the cutting and removal of woody material from the refuge for private (non-commercial) use by the individual removing the firewood. Firewood cutting is used as a forest management tool for purposes of thinning or clearing of a particular area.

Locations for this activity will be so designated by the forester in accordance with prescribed forest management treatments. Designated areas would be marked with blue paint and located on a map that the individual would receive when issued a Special Use Permit for the cutting.

Firewood cutting would generally occur August through October and upon announcement of availability. The collection period would be clearly stated on each permit.

Firewood cutting would require a Special Use Permit obtained at refuge headquarters. Only those trees marked with two spots of blue paint could be cut. Stumps would be cut as low as possible to the ground as long as some portion of the paint remained visible on the stump. Dead trees are not allowed to be cut. Individual permittees would abide by the same general restrictions and regulations as commercial contractors. Areas for firewood cutting would be readily accessible via existing roads.

Forest management is needed to improve general health, productivity, diversity and quality of the bottomland and upland forests. Forest stands often need to be gradually thinned to reduce competition, to increase diversity, and to increase understory structure.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Forester's time to designate areas and minimal time of refuge staff to issue permits.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs: None

Monitoring costs: Monitor compliance with permits. Habitat monitoring for vegetation response to cutting.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Firewood cutting activities could result in some soil disturbance that results in minor soil compaction and erosion or rutting. However, the cutting is done in late summer and early fall when ground conditions are dry. If periods of rain occur, the forester will temporarily close the area to prevent rutting and erosion. Minor siltation and turbidity of streams may occur. Most streams on the refuge are intermittent and are mostly dry during normal logging seasons. Besides the removal of some trees, minor damage of some residual trees and other vegetation will occur. Minor amounts of potential habitat for insects that routinely colonize down/rotting forest debris and the fauna that feeds on this insect life may be lost. However, within floodplain forest communities, this is absolutely not a limiting factor in that the forest floor is routinely heavily littered with down/decaying wood from the stand overstory. Alternatively, forest conditions can be improved with firewood cutting.

Firewood cutting would never be more than minor significance relative to commercial timber harvest operations, but the public could provide a valuable service in accomplishing prescribed treatments in non-commercial stands and in salvage operations. Currently, the existing users often do not take enough firewood to meet refuge objectives, and so there is no concern for overharvesting. No adverse, long term or cumulative impacts are anticipated at the current level of use and with the stipulations of the firewood cutting permit. If the use increases to a significant degree it will be reevaluated.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Refuge Determination:

☐ Use is Not Compatible
☒ Use is Compatible With Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

A specified time limit to cut/collect firewood is clearly stated on each permit.

All wood removed must be for personal (non-commercial) use only.

All roads, pipelines, and ditches must be kept clear of brush and debris.

All tops falling into rights-of-way must be immediately cleared.

To prevent rutting on access roads, entry is prohibited during periods of wet ground conditions.

Standing dead trees are not permitted to be cut.

No littering or fires.

No tractors allowed.

Unmarked trees less than three inches diameter may be cut to provide access to marked trees.

Personal protective equipment (glasses, gloves, chaps, etc...) is strongly recommended.

Justification:

Refuge forests need a variety of treatments to enhance habitat conditions for all migratory and resident wildlife species. Thinning forests creates openings needed to provide greater diversity and structure in the understory. This creates nesting habitat for songbirds, cover for resident wildlife and browse for deer.

Firewood cutting is a forest management tool that is compatible under the stipulations described. Properly regulated firewood cutting allows the use of a renewable resource, potentially can serve as a forest management tool to enhance wildlife habitat, and results in positive public relations for the refuge. Impacts to refuge resources are negligible and there is no potential for this use to lead to long term impacts given stipulations above.

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026

Description of Use:

All-terrain Vehicles

All-terrain vehicles are generally defined as three, four, or six-wheeled vehicles that are equipped with low pressure tires designed primarily for off-road use. The use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) is strictly in support of the priority public uses hunting and fishing. The refuge has a very limited system of roads and has historically used ATVs for access to remote areas for wildlife-dependent activities. Often ATV trails were historically being used prior to refuge establishment.

All ATV use is restricted to designated, marked trails. There are 22 miles of marked trails.

ATVs are prohibited from one hour after legal shooting hours end to 4:00 am. Trails are marked with signs and would be closed March 1 through August 31. Exception to closures is the ATV trail south of the levee on the Mollicy Unit and ATV trail from Eagle Nest Parking Lot to Cheney Slough which would be open March 1 through August 31 for fishing access only.

ATV access is by the general public for access to hunting and fishing areas. Raccoon hunters may not use ATVs. ATV tires are restricted to those no larger than 25x12 with a maximum 1" lug height and a maximum allowable tire pressure 7 lbs. psi. as indicated on the tire by the manufacturer. ATVs cannot exceed 750 lbs, 85 inches in length and 48 inches in width. ATVs are usually trailored to trail-heads and parking areas and ridden on trails to access remote areas within the refuge prior to walking to hunting or fishing areas. ATVs are not permitted off the designated trails.

Access to this refuge is limited. ATV trails provide access for priority public uses of hunting and fishing. The existing designated trail system is close to optimum to conduct the public use program. Minor additions/deletions, re-routing or seasonal opening date changes may be implemented from time to time to address needs as they occur and foresee no major changes/modifications.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

These lands have been open to public since they were acquired. Therefore, access trails, parking lots, signs, and other facilities as well as staff to enforce regulations and maintain these facilities have already been provided by the Service. Law enforcement is required for regulated use of trails and ATV specifications.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs: Every 3-5 years annual maintenance costs may increase in order to provide gravel for parking lots and roads, clearing and painting trails, and to replace signs.

Monitoring costs: Monitor consequences of public having access to the refuge, such as degree of littering and vandalism. Plants and wildlife will be monitored to determine any impacts as a result of public use. Habitat degradation in area of trails will need to be monitored.

Offsetting Revenue: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

In the early history of the refuge, trails were established for ATV use as a concession to limited access. ATVs were historically used in the area before the refuge was established. Use of ATVs does result in some minimal disturbance to wildlife as with any use. Restricting use to designated trails routed to avoid sensitive areas such as major stream crossings or archaeological areas and opening most trails to season use only minimizes overall potential impacts. The primary compatibility issues of concern are with disturbance to migratory waterfowl, endangered species, and habitat conservation.

Migratory waterfowl and endangered species are not significantly impacted by ATV use. Because of seasonal flooding (usually November through May), ATV trails are usually inaccessible during the winter months and during high waterfowl numbers of use.

No ATV trails exist within the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker habitat. Therefore, the impact to this species is negligible.

The trails presently designated for ATV use are primitive in nature and were historically logging roads, old field roads, or right-of-ways. The terrain is relatively flat and drainage is poor. During seasonal flooding the area is covered by several feet of water. Although the ground pressure exerted by ATVs is low, traffic eventually eliminates all vegetation within the trails and some rutting occurs when soils are saturated. Root damage to trees occurs when the soil cover has been eroded. This damage is also accompanied by disease, such as butt rot. Limiting the use to trails confines and minimizes the damage to habitat. However, use of the trails during wet conditions creates ruts and mud holes, encouraging detours (which amplifies the damage) at times and management or enforcement may be needed.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Refuge Determination:

☐ Use is Not Compatible
☐ Use is Compatible With Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

ATVs may be used only to reach areas open to wildlife-dependent activities such as hunting and fishing.

Most ATV trails are open only from September 1 – February 28.

ATV tires are restricted to those no larger than 25x12 with a maximum 1" lug height and a maximum allowable tire pressure of 7 lbs psi, as indicated on the tire by the manufacturer. ATVs cannot exceed 750 lbs, 85" in length and 48" in width.

Camping and fires are prohibited.

No equipment (vehicles, ATVs, blinds, decoys, stands, etc.) may be left over night.

Harassment of wildlife or excessive damage to vegetation is prohibited.

If any adverse impacts occur from any aspect of the limited public access, then further restrictions may be imposed to protect the plant and animal resources of the Refuge.

ATV use is limited to designated trails only. Parking ATV trailers are restricted to parking areas and along public access roads.

Justification:

Use of ATVs is an access concession strictly in support of the priority public uses of hunting and fishing. It provides the only vehicular access into approximately 2/3 of the northern unit of the refuge. ATVs cause much less damage to roads and trails than do

conventional and four-wheel drive vehicles. Use of ATVs help distribute hunters, thereby facilitating a balanced harvest and reducing hunter crowding. Providing such recreation is a refuge objective, and demand for this access is high among users.

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026

Description of Use:

Research, Scientific Collecting, Surveys

Research is an existing use and is conducted on Upper Ouachita NWR by independent scientists, universities, partnering agencies, and non-profit organizations. The refuge receives 0-10 requests per year on average from non-Service entities to conduct scientific research, scientific collecting, and/or surveys on refuge lands.

The Service's Research and management Studies (4 RM 6) and Appropriate Refuge Uses (603 FW1.10D(4)) policies indicate priority for scientific investigatory studies that contribute to the enhancement, protection, use, preservation, and management of native wildlife populations and their habitat as well as their natural diversity. Projects that contribute to refuge-specific needs for resource goals and objectives, where applicable, would be given a higher priority over other requests. Research proposals are required and will be reviewed by the refuge. If a proposal is approved, Special Use Permits are issued and administered by the Refuge Manager or Refuge Biologist.

Evaluation criteria for approving studies will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Contribution to specific Refuge management issues
- The level and type of disturbance to wildlife and habitats
- Impact or conflict with refuge-specific resources, priority wildlife-dependent public uses, other high-priority research or refuge habitat and wildlife management program
- Length of project

The Refuge can revoke a permit at any time for any reason.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Refuge staff reviews proposals, issues Special Use Permits and monitors the project to ensure compatibility. Additional support may also be provided depending on each specific request.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs: None

Monitoring costs: Refuge staff monitors the project to ensure compatibility. This should be negligible.

Offsetting revenues: None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Impacts would be project- and site-specific, where they will vary depending upon the nature and scope of the field work. Some effects would occur through disturbance which expected with some research activities, especially where researchers are entering sanctuaries or sensitive areas. Researcher disturbance could include altering wildlife behavior, trampling vegetation, or inflicting injury or stress due to trapping and handling wildlife. Death of animals from lethal collection methods or from accidental death and injury from handling may occur. Experimental manipulations of habitats may result in the alteration or destruction of wildlife habitat. Impacts may also occur from infrastructure necessary to support projects (e.g. permanent transects or plot markers, monitoring equipment, etc.)

Disturbance to breeding, resting, and feeding wildlife and their habitats may occur through frequent contact with researchers performing data collection and monitoring activities. Results of disturbance could include the abandonment of nest and young resulting from frequent visitation to nest or breeding sites.

These effects would be expected to be localized and temporary (short-lived), therefore minor, given the stipulations guiding project approval and implementation that are outlined below.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Refuge Determination:

☐ Use is Not Compatible
☒ Use is Compatible With Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

All researchers will be required to submit a detailed research proposal for review and approval by Refuge Biologist/Manager.

- Each project will require a Special Use Permit with a defined termination date.
- Annual or other short-term SUPs are preferred. Renewals will be subject to Refuge approval based upon compliance with SUP terms.
- Special Use Permits will contain specific terms and conditions that the researcher must follow relative to activity, location, duration, seasonality, etc. to ensure continued compatibility. Measures to minimize potential impacts may be developed and included as part of the study design and included on the SUP. If researcher is out of compliance with terms of the SUP or if unacceptable impacts to natural resources or conflicts arise or are documented, then the Refuge may suspend, modify or terminate a SUP.

- Consultation will be conducted for any research activities that may possibly have an impact on threatened or endangered species. Only project which have no effect or not likely to adversely affect will be approved.
- Investigators must possess appropriate State and Federal permits for their projects.
- Research requiring species collection will only be authorized after careful consideration by Refuge Biologist/Manager. Only minimum number of samples for collection would be permitted.
- Researchers will follow all refuge-specific regulations unless otherwise indicated in the Special Use Permit
- Upon completion of the project, all equipment must be removed and sites restored to the Refuge Biologist/Manager's satisfaction. Conditions for clean-up and removal of equipment and physical markers will be stipulated in the SUP.
- The Refuge staff will be provided copies of all publication resulting from the project. Refuge staff will be provided with copies of raw data if requested at the conclusion of the project.

Justification:

Research, scientific collecting, and surveys on Refuge lands are inherently valuable to the Service because they expand scientific information available for resource management decisions. Refuge monitoring and research will directly benefit and support refuge goals, objectives and management plans and activities and can contribute to recovery of endangered or threatened species. Management of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitat should improve through the application of knowledge gained from monitoring and research. By allowing the use to occur under the stipulations described above, it is anticipated that wildlife species which could be disturbed during the use would find sufficient food resources and resting places so their abundance and use will not be measurably lessened on the Refuge. Additionally, it is anticipated that monitoring, as needed, will prevent unacceptable or irreversible impacts to wildlife and their habitats. The combination of stipulations identified above and conditions included in the Special Use Permits will ensure that proposed projects contribute to the enhancement, protection, conservation and management of native wildlife populations and their habitats on the Refuge. As a result, these projects will help fulfill Refuge purposes; contribute to the mission of the NWRS, and maintain biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge.

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026

Description of Use:

Cooperative Farming Program

Cooperative farming is utilized on the refuge to manage and maintain approximately 1,700 acres of waterfowl impoundment habitats that provide seasonally flooded crops and moist-soil units necessary to meet the refuge's waterfowl habitat objectives. This farming program is a critical component of the refuge's habitat management program. The refuge's cooperative farmers enter into annual cooperative farming agreements specifying what crops will be grown in specific fields for both the refuge and cooperative farmer's share. The cooperative farmer receives 75 percent of planted acres, while the

refuge receives 25 percent of the planted acres. The refuge's crop share is strategically located in areas that can be flooded in the winter to provide waterfowl foraging habitat in support of North American Waterfowl Management Plan objectives for the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. At the present time, the refuge does not have the staff or equipment necessary to manage and maintain the acreage needed to meet its waterfowl foraging objectives without the assistance of the cooperative farming program. Refuge cooperative farming operations will continue under carefully regulated conditions.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Refuge staff drafts Cooperative Farming Agreement and necessary Pesticide Use Proposals.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs: None

Monitoring costs: Refuge staff monitors the farming program to ensure compatibility and compliance to the farming agreement.

Offsetting revenues: 25% share provided by the farmer can be in the form of infrastructure maintenance and pumping of water in addition to unharvested crops.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use: Cooperative farmers grow rice, millet, and milo on the refuge under an annually updated cooperative farming agreement. Refuge crop shares are left standing in the field to provide high energy grain and forage primarily for wintering waterfowl. The cooperative farmers' harvested fields are also used extensively by snipe, shorebirds, geese, ducks, deer, and other wildlife. All cooperative farming takes place in the refuge's core waterfowl sanctuary area.

Cooperative farming results in some degree of soil erosion due to disking and planting operations. The impact of soil erosion on adjacent wetlands and water bodies is minimal because of maintained grass buffer strips around the farm and the extensive use of flash board risers to retain and slowly release sediment-laden water. Cooperative farmers are allowed to use approved pesticides under a closely monitored pesticide use proposal system. Refuge-approved pesticides have low toxicity and fast biodegradation rates compared to other commonly used agricultural pesticides. Under approved label application rates and methods, approved pesticides should have minimal effect on the biological environment. However, the potential exists for misapplication or accidental spills of approved pesticides. During the past 10 years there have been no known pesticide accidents or pesticide-related wildlife mortality reported on the refuge. Careful monitoring of cooperative farmer pesticide use should further reduce any potential impacts from pesticide use on the refuge.

Public Review and Comment: The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Determination (check one below):

_____ Use is Not Compatible

X Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility: The cooperative farming program is regulated through annual cooperative farming agreements that specify the field crops to be grown, acceptable farming practices, and approved pesticide use procedures. Special conditions contained in each cooperative farming agreement provide the following requirements: no fall disking allowed, vegetative filter strips are maintained around all fields and water bodies, crops must be harvested by November 15 and no drainage of seasonally flooded habitat is allowed until after March 1. Refuge crops will be planted in designated fields and not be manipulated in any way after maturity and only approved pesticides will be used when the level of pest occurrence is at the economic threshold level as indicated by crop scouting. Under these carefully controlled conditions, the cooperative farming program has been and is expected to continue to be compatible with the refuge's purposes.

Justification: The cooperative farming actions for Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge are in accordance with Service guidelines for the protection, management, and enhancement of habitats for wildlife populations on the refuge. Adherence to the cooperative farming agreement promotes the enhancement of habitats for migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and resident wildlife.

Description of Use:

Commercial Recording

The use is commercial photography, videography, filming and audio recording (collectively referred to as "recording") of wildlife or nature scenes on D'Arbonne NWR. Commercial recording typically involves creating a documentary film, taking still photographs, or recording wildlife sounds that are intended to be sold for income or revenue or traded for goods or services. This CD does not apply to bona fide news media activities or developing news stories.

Commercial recording will be considered once requested on a case by case basis. Each request is unique and will have to be evaluated based on impacts to wildlife, habitat and priority public uses. A Special Use Permit (SUP) would be required to conduct commercial recording. Recording could occur anywhere on the refuge unless otherwise specified. Areas may be restricted seasonally to avoid impacts to sensitive wildlife, closed areas, no hunting zones, sanctuaries or other specially designated areas where human disturbance through recording could be detrimental. The refuge biologist and/or manager will review each request location to determine if it is acceptable.

The photos and footage shot on the refuge will increase the understanding of the native flora and fauna within the refuge itself. Photography is one of the six priority public uses and the images taken on the refuge should be shared with everyone in the public. Commercial photography will promote the refuge and will also promote the mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service through a better understanding of the resource and sharing the beauty of the refuge. The photos/footage would only be used for educational and interpretive purposes.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Annual refuge operation and maintenance funds are adequate to support public use activities. This activity is supported through the public use program with additional administrative maintenance of permits.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:
Commercial photographers use the same facilities as the general public.

Maintenance costs: None

Monitoring costs: Monitoring costs by the station employees will be covered by the permittee.

Offsetting revenues: each commercial permit will cost \$500-\$2000 to offset costs of staff time associated with monitoring of recording activities

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

There will be a short-term impact to interior fauna and flora. This impact should be negligible because special conditions outlined in the SUP will minimize impacts to vegetation and wildlife and ensure that the use is consistent with goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Special conditions may include, but not be limited to, minimum distances to species, timing within the lifecycle of the flora/fauna, limits on size of recording crews, number of visits to specific sites, equipment, fees, etc.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment will be 14 days and will be announced in the local newspaper(s). Comments will be summarized in this section after being received.

Refuge Determination:

_____ Use is Not Compatible
_____ Use is Compatible With Following Stipulations

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

All commercial recording will be required to submit a detailed proposal for review and approval by Refuge Biologist/Manager. Requests will only be considered if they demonstrate a means to enhance education, appreciation, and/or understanding of the refuge. A Special Use Permit for recording will be issued on a per event basis and will contain conditions under which activities are allowed to operate.

- All photos and footage would have to be approved by the refuge manager within 180 days of development of the product(s).
- All photos and footage would have to give proper credit to the refuge and the Fish and Wildlife Service: "Filmed on location at D'Arbonne NWR, Farmerville, Louisiana courtesy of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service".
- Violation of any refuge, Federal or State wildlife law would result in termination of the permit and no refunds would be given.
- Permittee would have to notify the Refuge Manager two weeks in advance to recording
- The refuge manager has authority to shut down filming at any time they see fit.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not responsible for any mishaps or injuries that may occur during filming and associated activities. The permittee acknowledges and agrees to provide appropriate safety equipment and caution all people participating in the commercial recording activities about the hazards likely to be encountered on refuge managed lands and waters.
- Permittee will remove all equipment and completely clear and clean each location of any materials brought to the site upon leaving each day. There is no overnight usage. Permittee will not erect any facilities or structures, whether temporary or permanent, without written approval from the Refuge Manager. Permittee will not clear, trim, cut or disturb vegetation, light any fires, or dig any holes
- Photographer or film maker will provide one free copy of all material generated on the refuge to the refuge manager.
- Permittee must furnish a bond or deposit made in cash or by certified check, in an amount to be set by the Refuge Manager to ensure full compliance with all of the conditions prescribed in the SUP.

Failure to comply with all the SUP conditions may result in the suspension or cancellation of the SUP, including the possible loss of future USP privileges at the discretion of the Refuge Manager. Permits may be modified at any time by the Refuge Manager.

Justification:

Stipulations above ensure that these activities minimize impacts. Commercial recording can reach new audiences with messages beneficial to the Service and to wildlife conservation.

Commercial recording is considered an economic use of a national wildlife refuge and is guided by the following policies:

16USC668dd, 50 CFR 27.71, Motion or Sound Pictures

The taking or filming of any motion or sound pictures on a national wildlife refuge for subsequent commercial use is prohibited except as may be authorized under the provisions of 43 CFR part 5.

16USC668dd, 50 CFR 27.97, Private Operations

Soliciting business or conducting a commercial enterprise on any national wildlife refuge is prohibited except as may be authorized by special permit.

16USC668dd, 50 CFR 27.86, Begging

Begging on any national wildlife refuge is prohibited. Soliciting of funds for the support or assistance of any cause or organization is also prohibited unless properly authorized.

16USC668dd, 50 CFR, Subpart A, 29.1 Allowing Economic Uses on National Wildlife Refuges

We may only authorize public or private economic use of the natural resources of any national wildlife refuge, in accordance with 16 U.S.C. 715s, where we determine that the use contributes to the achievement of the national wildlife refuge purposes or the National Wildlife Refuge System mission.

8 RM 16, Audio Visual Productions**5 RM 17, Commercial & Economic Uses on National Wildlife Refuges****43 CFR Part 5, Making Pictures, Television Productions or Sound Tracks on Certain Areas Under the Jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior****Public Law 106-206, Commercial Filming**

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026

Approval of Compatibility Determinations

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature/Date)

**Regional Compatibility
Coordinator:** _____
Pam Freedman Horton (Signature/Date)

Refuge Supervisor: _____
Ricky Ingram (Signature/Date)

**Regional Chief, National
Wildlife Refuge System,
Southeast Region:** _____
David Viker (Signature/Date)

Mandatory 15-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2026